

Palm Tree Road Bridge
Spanning the Sheboygan River,
on Palm Tree Road
Village of St. Cloud
Fond du Lac County
Wisconsin

HAER No. WI-34

HAER
WIS,
20-SACLO,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
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Palm Tree Road Bridge

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Location: Spanning the Sheboygan River, on Palm Tree Road,
Village of St. Cloud, Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin

Date of Construction: 1903

Builder: Alphonse Halter

Present Owner: Township of Marshfield

Present Use: Vehicular bridge

Significance: The Palm Tree Road Bridge is a unique example of stone
arch bridges in Wisconsin. It contains the largest
number of spans (nine) of any surviving stone arch
bridge in the State, and has a Classical Roman design,
unique to the State.

Historian: Lola Bennett
Wisconsin Historic Bridge Recording Project
August 1987

HISTORY

The village of St. Cloud was incorporated in 1909 as a station on the Chicago & North Western Railroad line. The town was settled by a largely German population. In 1910, the population was 310, and the village contained a general store, a lumberyard, a cheese factory, and a manufactory of farm implements. The economy was based on agriculture.¹

The Palm Tree Road Bridge spans the Sheboygan River, in the countryside just on the outskirts of the village. The exact date of construction for the bridge has not been determined. According to one resident of St. Cloud, it was built in 1903. This date is independently confirmed by one of the builder's sons.² Another son, however, asserts that the structure was built in the late 1890s.³ Surviving town and county records do not discuss the circumstances of construction and, since St. Cloud did not have a newspaper in the early part of the century, any historic accounts of the construction of the bridge may not exist.

The Palm Tree Road Bridge was repaired in 1950 by Francis Dreifurest, a local mason. The railings were straightened and some of the stones in the arches were replaced with bricks.⁴

ALPHONSE HALTER

According to local sources, the bridge was built by a Swiss immigrant named Alphonse Halter, who lived in the nearby community of Mt. Calvary before moving to Fond du Lac. Alphonse Halter was born in Switzerland on July 25, 1858, arrived in America with his family in 1871, and learned his trade by working as an apprentice to a mason. In addition to the Palm Tree Bridge, Halter's lifetime achievements included the construction of St. Michael's Church in Dotyville, Wisconsin.⁵

DESCRIPTION

The bridge is a rubble-limestone, nine-arch span with pipe-metal railings. Its length, including approaches, is about 154 feet, and it is 16 feet wide. The arches are not quite semicircular (their rise-to-span ratio is uniformly about 1:2.5 instead of 1:2). All of the arches spring about 9 inches above the waterline. The center span measures about 14 feet 9 inches across; the adjoining pair, 13 feet 8 inches; the next two pairs 12 feet 8 inches and 11 feet 9 inches respectively, and the end pair, 10 feet 4 inches. The width of the piers is about 3 feet 8 inches. The ring stones (including keystones) are about 2 feet in height; their width ranges from about 3-5 inches at the keystones to about 10-12 inches at the skewbacks. The bridge displays a classic Roman profile, which dictates an uneven number of semicircular arches, with the largest span in the center, flanked by paired spans decreasing in size and separated by piers about one-third the width of the arch spans.⁶

SIGNIFICANCE

The Palm Tree Road Bridge is a unique example of stone arch bridges in Wisconsin. It contains the largest number of spans of any surviving stone arch bridge in the State, and has a Classical Roman design, also unique in the State.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Maurice McKenna, ed., History of Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin (Chicago: S. J. Clark Publishing Company, 1912).
- 2 Edmund Halter, interview with Lola Bennett, project historian, (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin), July 1987.
- 3 Richard Halter, interviews with Lola Bennett, project historian, (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin), July and August 1987.

The town clerk of Marshfield Township said that her husband's grandfather helped build the bridge, and that it was built in 1857 by George Halter. She also mentioned that a St. Cloud resident, by the name of Salchert, may recall the events surrounding construction of the bridge, but he is nearing his one-hundredth birthday and, apparently, his son, Elmer Salchert, is the only person who is able to readily communicate with him. Shortly after the town clerk spoke with Elmer about interviewing his father, Elmer died of a heart attack and, thus, they were unable to complete the interview.

- 4 Pat Will, Marshfield Town Clerk, interview with Lola Bennett, project historian, (St. Cloud, Wisconsin), July 1987.
- 5 Richard Halter.
- 6 Jeffrey A. Hess and Robert M. Frame, Historic Highway Bridges in Wisconsin: Stone and Concrete Arch Bridges (Wisconsin Department of Transportation, 1986), p. 143.

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- Halter, Edmund. Interview with Lola Bennett, project historian, July 1987.
- Halter, Richard. Interviews with Lola Bennett, project historian, July and August 1987.
- Hess, Jeffrey A. and Robert M. Frame. History Highway Bridges in Wisconsin: Stone and Concrete Arch Bridges. Wisconsin Department of Transportation, 1986.
- McKenna, Maurice, ed. History of Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin. Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912.
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